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February 10, 2014

UNH Personality Psychologist Unveils New Theory of Personal Intelligence



Mayer, the renowned University of New Hampshire professor and psychologist who co-developed the groundbreaking theory of emotional intelligence, now reviews decades of research to introduce another paradigm-shifting idea: that in order to become our best selves, we use an even broader intelligence—personal intelligence—to understand our own personality and the personalities of the people around us.

Photo credit: UNH Photographic Services.

and we adjust how we interact with them accordingly. We run through scenarios in our heads, trying to anticipate how others will react, in order to choose the best course in dealing with a boss, a coworker, or a partner,” Mayer says.

“We pick up on small pieces of feedback about ourselves from others, which we incorporate into a fuller and more accurate perception of ourselves. And we make all kinds of decisions—about work-life balance, the neighborhood we live in, or who we spend our time with—based on what we think will be the best fit for our personalities,” he says.

These skills are all part of personal intelligence, and they come much more naturally to some than to others.

Mayer pioneered work in a new area of intelligence, along with Yale’s Peter Salovey, when they co-wrote the influential 1990 article “Emotional Intelligence” that sparked bestselling books and created a revolution in the

DURHAM, N.H. – John Mayer, the University of New Hampshire psychologist and internationally recognized researcher who co-developed the groundbreaking theory of emotional intelligence, now introduces another paradigm-shifting idea: in order to become our best selves, we use an even broader intelligence—personal intelligence—to understand our own personality and the personalities of the people around us.

In “Personal Intelligence: The Power of Personality and How It Shapes Our Lives,” (Scientific American/Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2014) Mayer lays out the various components of personal intelligence, at the same time drawing on fascinating case studies about a range of figures including athletes, journalists, police detectives and painters, to create an eye-opening primer.

“People who are high in personal intelligence are able to anticipate their own desires and actions, predict the behavior of others, motivate themselves over the long term, and make better life decisions,” Mayer says.

Drawing on his review of decades of research, including research conducted in his laboratory at UNH, Mayer’s new theory gives us an invaluable new framework for thinking about our own lives and understanding the lives of those around us.

“Think of all the ways we read and interpret the people around us each day: We notice body language and facial expressions to estimate one another’s moods. We draw initial guesses about personalities based on how people dress and present themselves,

ways we think about intelligence.

Writing about Mayer's new book, Salovey, now president of Yale University, said: "John D. Mayer has done so much to get us to think about human personality in new ways. With 'Personal Intelligence,' Mayer once again challenges us—arguing that there is a set of skills that may determine what sets successful people apart from those who seem oblivious to the needs and desires of those around them. He is a clear thinker and a beautiful writer, and his arguments compel us to broaden our understanding of what constitutes an intelligent individual."

Mayer is a professor of psychology at UNH and a key innovator in intelligence research. He has written more than 125 scientific articles, books, and psychological tests, including the internationally known Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT™). He has lectured around the world and has appeared on NPR and BBC-TV. His work has been covered in The New York Times, Time, The Washington Post, and The New Republic.

The [University of New Hampshire](http://www.unh.edu), founded in 1866, is a world-class public research university with the feel of a New England liberal arts college. A land, sea, and space-grant university, UNH is the state's flagship public institution, enrolling 12,300 undergraduate and 2,200 graduate students.

PHOTO

<http://www.unh.edu/universityevents/speakersbureau/images/johnmayer.jpg>

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Credit: UNH Photographic Services

Prof. John Mayer can be reached at jack.mayer@unh.edu and 603-862-3851. Requests for review copies of Personal Intelligence should be directed to Katie Kurtzman, assistant director of publicity, at katie.kurtzman@fsgbooks.com or 212-206-5325.

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